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Anwar Sadat and the 1973 Yom Kippur War  
Force: Sadat's ultimate instrument of statecraft

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# Anwar Sadat and the 1973 Yom Kippur War – Force: Sadat's ultimate instrument of statecraft

## **Introduction**

Sadat's effective use of force among the available instruments of statecraft led to the successful accomplishment of his political objectives in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. While he pursued a peaceful return of Arab occupied territory after the war, he concurrently prepared for the battle of Egypt's destiny. Although struggles in the region continue, Sadat still represents the heart of the Muslim people's call for peace and justice in the Middle East. This thesis will examine Sadat's national security and military strategies, and his effective use of the instruments of statecraft that led to his decision to use force in the Yom Kippur War.

## **National security strategy and the precursors to war** **Historical precedence**

Egypt has been a linchpin of regional trends and developments in the Middle East for much of its recorded history, benefiting from favorable demographics, a well-placed geostrategic position, and its place in the Middle East as the undisputed center of Arab and Islamic intellectual and cultural life.<sup>1</sup> Based on its status as the first Middle Eastern country to adopt the nation-state system, many regional issues had placed Egypt in a leadership role. Egypt was able to exercise Arab world leadership based on their leading role in nation building and modernization, their large modern army, and the significant and growing middle class.<sup>2</sup> The Egyptian rich heritage contributed to its ability to influence the shape of the Middle East even throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the establishment in 1948 of Israel as a new player in the region threatened its ability to influence the Arab states.

The disruption from the colonial days of Egypt and the subsequent relinquishing of its interests in the Suez canal saw the emergence of Egypt as a state in transformation, a period that continued

throughout the 1900s. Gamel Abdel Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 and the successful resistance of British colonialism were turning points that impacted the internal and external political affairs of Egypt, while setting the stage for continued turmoil that would last throughout the next several decades. A precursor to the Six Day War in 1967, Nasser seized upon the delay of the United Nations (UN) to act upon his aggressive occupation of the Sinai Peninsula and closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping. During deliberations of the U.N. proposal to break the blockage, Israel lost no time and launched a preemptive attack on Egypt, Jordan, and Syria.<sup>3</sup> The humiliating defeat of Arab forces during the Six Day War that ensued ensured heightened turmoil for the Middle East, and all but guaranteed that the war would not end there. Skirmishes between Israeli and Egyptian forces continued for two years in a war of attrition and during that time, Israel boldly built up defensive positions and civilian habitats in the newly acquired security buffer of Syrian and Egyptian land. The precursors for yet another territorial struggle and fight for honor were well underway when Anwar Sadat succeeded Nasser in 1970. The major events of the 1900s: the creation of Israel in 1948, the 1952 Egyptian revolution, the disastrous Suez Canal Crisis in 1956, the Six Day War in 1967, and the subsequent war of attrition in 1969-1970 all set the stage for the Yom Kippur War. Although a counter-offensive was not preordained in the first years following the Six Day War, in hindsight, it seems that it was a given after all.<sup>4</sup>

### **The domestic and international environment**

The Suez Canal exchange of hands in the early 1900s contributed to the crippling debt that initially led to Egypt's long suffering economy. The earlier struggles for independence, as well as the wars with Israel, had been costly for Egypt. The Six Day War in particular brought Egypt to the brink of devastation. Anwar Sadat assessed that the status quo of 'no peace, no war' could not continue without destroying what was left of Egypt's economy, or of Arab unity.<sup>5</sup> With a growing

population, Egypt faced two serious economic problems, food output and water constraints. Additionally, mobilization efforts required a large percentage of the Egyptian gross domestic product; and this further exacerbated Egypt's economic troubles. To ensure Egypt's survival, Sadat needed to unite Arabs in yet another confrontation with their new neighbor, for only the return of the occupied territory and the restoration of dignity to the people would provide Egypt the chance for survival, and only then would he be in a position to strengthen the Egyptian economy.

Among Arab nations, the ongoing Palestinian movement's internal disputes placed additional strains on Egypt's domestic affairs. To the North, the neighboring state of Jordan was engaged in a peace plan of its own with Israel, one that did not garner Arab unity or support. These events presented obstacles to Sadat's grand strategy to unite the Arab countries in what would become known as the Yom Kippur War.

Not only had the economy suffered greatly, but also the devastating personnel losses had severely shattered the Egyptian military forces. Egypt had elected to keep its military forces at mobilization strength after the war in 1967, despite the destruction of its air force and the significant army losses of over 10,000 casualties and an 80% loss of its major military end items. Compounding these losses, several years of 'trench disease' had strained military-civil relations on the domestic home front. Arabs in the Sinai, Gaza Strip, West Bank, and Golan Heights were in a humiliating position -- under Israeli occupation. The humiliation alone of this territorial status brought the Arab leaders to the same conclusion: nothing less than the return of all the occupied areas would be satisfactory, and war would be the means. There would be no negotiations, no recognition, or settlement with Israel. <sup>6</sup>

When Sadat assumed power in 1970, his leadership marked a change for Egypt and the Arab world. Several factors drove his political agenda: the defeat in 1967, the need to liberate the Sinai from Israeli occupation, the decline of economic fortunes of his country, waning Egyptian support

for Nasser's politics, and the emergence of détente in the early 1970s.<sup>7</sup> The Jarring peace delegation continued in the midst of international terrorist activity designed to pressure the Arabs into activities that would further their territorial claims, and the threat of Arab unity collapsing was a distinct possibility.<sup>8</sup> Sadat needed a superpower to broker a negotiation with Israel; but with the U.S. and Soviet policy leaning toward détente, this would erode his ability to capitalize upon superpower rivalry to lever a settlement in the Middle East.<sup>9</sup> These conditions provided a convincing argument that a war was his only chance to save Egypt.

Sadat inherited a defeated and demoralized Egypt, and radical Islamic opposition movements took advantage of this, seriously challenging Egypt's domestic stability. Both nonviolent and violent groups of Islamic activism held the same objective -- transformation of the state into Islamic order. Although Sadat attempted to work with the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), it turned against him when it realized he would not fulfill its objectives. The MB increased political casualties and violent activities under the belief that the contemporary regime had to be destroyed to pave the way for a true Islamic order.<sup>10</sup> Sadat's leadership had withstood one coup attempt in May 1971 by his vice president and head of the Arab Socialist Union, Ali Sabri. Sadat's ability to maintain control despite Soviet influences and challenges to his presidency was one of the key reasons he was able to reach out to Moscow in a newfound "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation," a treaty that would lead to weapons acquisition opportunities. Not only had Sadat confronted civil unrest, but also he used it as an opportunity to consolidate his political power by isolating leftists, Nasserists, and pan Arabists factions.

### **Assumptions, motivations, and constraints:**

What motivated Anwar Sadat to move forward to battle with an opponent that had beaten Egypt on more than one occasion? Was it the chance for a new beginning after the defeat in the 1967 war? No doubt, these questions contributed to Sadat's desire for stability in the Middle East.

Confronted with an economically weak home front and the potential loss of his leadership role in Egypt, Sadat could not weather a lengthy status quo of “no peace and no war” without risking the loss of critical support from the Arab populace. The “year of decision”<sup>11</sup> had passed and time was of the essence if he was to remain Egypt’s ruler. His power was weakening. Unless he could manage a psychological turn of the Egyptian peoples’ will, the opportunity to gain what Egypt had lost would elude him. Finding a way to leverage U.S. power played heavily in Sadat’s strategy. The U.S. had demonstrated its support for Israel, and Sadat assumed they would again come to their aid given the overt flow of weapons from Russian arms into Arab hands. Sadat looked beyond this constraint; the true objective he would pursue would take place when the war ended: negotiations for peace and a resolution of the ongoing conflict.<sup>12</sup> Another critical constraint facing Sadat was the lack of offensive weapons to conduct a military option against Israel. Sadat did not have sufficient military equipment to stage an effective military operation against Israel. The Egyptian military, even with its additional training, was no match for the U.S. backed Israeli Defense Force (IDF), not to mention its superior air force capability that was demonstrated in the Six Day War. Sadat needed military support from the Soviets to put his military plan into action. He pursued this course of action relentlessly, and almost to no avail. Soviet compliance with the terms of its relationship was critical, and its prolonged reluctance to live up to the agreement greatly affected the timing of the war. Sadat forced the issue by boldly expelling Soviet advisors and leveraging Saudi financial commitments to assist them with purchases of additional offensive weapons. When the Soviets finally agreed to support Sadat, his emphasis turned to war planning and calculating the exact time to seize the initiative. Sadat also used the U.S. fear of another war in the Middle East to his advantage by gambling on their intervention to prevent escalation in the region, just as he would take advantage of the Soviet desire to remain a power broker in the Middle East. If Sadat wanted a success story, he would have to calculate his moves extremely carefully.

## **National interests and threats**

### **Sadat - strategy perspective**

Sadat's earlier involvement in revolutionary movements, as well as his role in overseeing the official abdication of King Farouk initiated him into strategy planning in leadership circles, as well as demonstrated his loyalty to the ruling party. He gained additional knowledge on strategic planning while serving in a variety of ministerial and political posts in the 1950s and 1960s, and was considered a competent administrator. Still a virtual unknown, he understood the necessity to establish credibility and demonstrate his leadership abilities in his new role. Sadat's initial undertakings included diplomatic efforts and negotiations with the Israelis in the Jarring Accords for the return of the Sinai lands taken in the Six Days War.<sup>13</sup> Unprecedented for an Arab country, this type of bold move emerged as his trademark in politics. Recognizing Israel's perception of security improvements from its new territory boundaries, Sadat assumed Israel would not find it in its interest to negotiate. He would need to pursue an alternative plan. This plan included a collective security strategy for the region, and required Arab unity and support. His influential power in this arena proved invaluable in the later planning stages of the war. Sadat's ability to project Egypt's gains into the future for the greater good of the Arab character was the key component of his vision for Egypt.

### **National interests - a question of survival, economic prosperity, and honor**

Sadat's national interests were apparent to him from the day he assumed power: defense of the homeland, economic survival, favorable Middle East order, and promotion of Arab values. In pursuant of these interests, his strategy included three main objectives: pursuit of peace initiatives for the return of Israeli occupied territory, restoration of dignity for the Arab people, and development of closer ties with Arab leaders in the world. Sadat was essentially committed to only



one thing: strengthening the Arab character.<sup>14</sup> He estimated the end state to achieve these objectives required an alliance with the West, and preferably the U.S. He further recognized the difficulty he faced in defending these national interests: President Johnson had extended U.S. commitment to Israel by intervening on its behalf in the Six Day War. Compounding the U.S. support was its reluctance to call for a withdrawal of Israeli forces and the subsequent increase in arms shipments to Israel. Sadat's defense of Egypt's national interests faced a solidified stance of the current U.S. position in the Middle East.<sup>15</sup>

### **Threats and Opportunities**

Sadat believed he could achieve his political objectives and demonstrate his resolve to provide for the security of Egypt's national interests despite the threat of potential loss of his leadership role in Egypt. The Arabs would also hold him responsible for the permanent loss of the occupied territory to Israel, and time was of the essence -- the longer he waited, the more difficult it would be to expel them from their increasing permanent residency on Arab soil. Sadat's strategy called for a change in the existing political and military balance in the Middle East - by undermining Israeli national security doctrine, he could demonstrate the resolve of the Egyptian and Arab people. Sadat would use this as an opportunity to project the strength of the Arab will and commitment that the continued status quo of 'no war and no peace' threatened. Sadat believed he could take advantage of the threat of another Middle East war, assuming it would be unacceptable to either superpower, and persuade them to engage in diplomatic negotiations.<sup>16</sup> Although the U.S. viewed a strong Israel as a deterrent to another Middle East war, this status quo was incompatible with Arab pride and national interests. When it became clear to Sadat that U.S. intervention to undertake negotiations with Israel was not likely, he knew that a war of limited objectives was inevitable. The United Nations Resolution 242 call for the return of occupied territories had no acceptable terms for Egypt, and Sadat's pursuit to break the deadlock in a diplomatic manner had run out.

Sadat believed he had certain advantages over his opponent that created the ideal opportunity for him to wage his strategy. First, Egypt had a just and legal cause for fighting -- to take back what had been taken from them in the last war. Second, they had sympathetic international opinion on their side. Third, the Arabs would pull together and provide him the strength he would need. Fourth, the staunchness of the Arab infantry soldier in defense combat would not be underestimated again. And finally, Egypt would have a nearly absolute air defense cover over the Canal Zone.<sup>17</sup>

## **Integration of statecraft tools**

### **Cooperative and persuasive tools**

The alliance of the British, French, and Israeli governments stood in opposition to Sadat's political objectives. This alliance had already proven its strength in the UN resolution that placed peacekeeping troops in the region, as well as its capability in deterring the overthrow of the King of Jordan by the Syrians.<sup>18</sup> Sadat viewed an alliance with the West as critically important to his efforts in negotiations with Israel and he actively pursued his own alliances once he made the decision to go to war. In a matter of six months, he gained support from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, and Morocco, successfully convincing them of their commitment to Arab culture. Additionally, he gained the support of the Organization of African Unity in their condemnation of Israel, as well as the support from the non-aligned countries. All told, he was successful through the use of his soft power and persuasion in securing support of 100 countries toward his efforts to reclaim the occupied territory.

Equally important in Sadat's alliance building was the formation of the Federal Arab Military Command of Egypt, Syria, and Libya. This gave Sadat the option of a joint offensive on two fronts and the chance to alter the balance of both political and military power in the conflict.<sup>19</sup> At the Alexandria Conference in August 1973, the Syrian and Egyptian decision to wage war marked the

first time that the Arabs had pulled together in a coordinated military operation against Israel. Sadat recognized the failed diplomatic efforts since 1967, specifically the Jarring Accords, U.N. resolutions, and Secretary Rogers' peace initiatives; none had proven supportive of Egypt, and most had suggested more Arab concessions. Sadat pushed diplomacy to the limit, he even tried to break the deadlock one more time after the Soviets departed Egypt, but it was clear that the U.S. would not seize the initiative and engage Israel on behalf of Arab territorial claims. Leveraging Kissinger's ethnicity to cause a peaceful change in the stalemate was a last attempt at diplomacy, but this too proved unsuccessful. Although Sadat achieved success with alliance formations, in and of themselves, they were insufficient as a means to achieve his political objectives.

### **Diplomacy and force – breaking the stalemate**

Sadat sought to use the statecraft tool of military force as a diplomatic means to break the existing stalemate and force the U.S. to negotiate a peace settlement in the Middle East. Egypt was no match for a U.S. backed Israel, and the element of surprise would be a decisive factor in his military success. By Sadat's own accord, he was going to war with or without arms support from the Soviet Union. In that regard, the military strike against Israel was inevitable. In order for Egypt to regain their lost honor, he had to demonstrate the resolve of the Arab people, as well as their ability to stand up for themselves. Sadat relentlessly pursued diplomatic efforts to resolve the lingering territorial dispute, and when he finally accepted the hesitancy of both superpowers and the U.N. to intervene, he began to simultaneously pursue a parallel course of action that would employ the coercive tool of military force. Israel was not willing to return all the land that they had taken because it was not in its national interest to do so. Without the engagement of a superpower to bring Israel to the negotiation table, Sadat needed a catalyst to break the deadlock. He would use

the instrument of force to demonstrate his will to defend Egypt's national interests before the Arab people lost complete faith in his leadership.

Considering ongoing détente progress, Russia had attempted to restrain the Arab states from overt military action through diplomatic efforts and a slowdown in the delivery of arms. Later, they reluctantly dropped their opposition to Arab use of force because they did not want to run the risk of jeopardizing their entire position in the Middle East. While the Soviet Union vacillated on its role in the Middle East, Henry Kissinger continued to pursue a policy of “no war, no peace” with the hopes of eventually ejecting the Soviet Union from the Middle East.<sup>20</sup> Sadat watched the superpower politics closely, and concluded a conflict was necessary as the only means left to break the stalemate. After repeated attempts to gain U.S. support failed, perhaps due to their belief that Egypt was too weak and unable to fight again, Sadat steadily lost faith in diplomatic measures under the continuing pressures of the “no war, no peace” policy that was hemorrhaging Arab unity.<sup>21</sup> The U.S. appeared to only respect force, and did not seem compelled to support Egypt in the absence of it.<sup>22</sup> Sadat had promised the Arabs that 1971 would be the ‘year of decision’ for Egypt, and the rising internal dissent over the lack of action brought him to the final conclusion that war was indeed the necessary spark for Egypt's revival. His leadership would most likely not last through another aborted military action, such as the one he suffered earlier in March of 1971. The final decision to use force came in November 1972. Détente initiatives on behalf of the two superpowers precluded Sadat from garnering their support for a peaceful resolution and return of the occupied land. Sadat would use force to persuade Israel of the futility of continued aggression, of occupying Arab territory and of ignoring Palestinians rights. His decision to use force was integral to his total strategy: to undermine Israeli national security doctrine (break the belief that their forces were invincible) and to prepare the Egyptian armed forces to secure the land in an offensive operation designed to break the political stalemate.<sup>23</sup> Sadat took advantage of his

renewed popularity and support from the military as a result of his decision to expel the Soviets. His forces had questioned the Soviet's role in Egypt and they believed they would not go to war as long as they were present on Arab soil. Happy to see the 'advisors' leave, the military gave their full support to Sadat's efforts. With little inherent power at his disposal, Sadat used the political will of his people and the strength of his military manpower to help create power as an end to his objectives.

Another significant Egyptian diplomatic objective within the Arab community was to bring oil as a weapon into the battle with Israel. A cut back on Arab oil production forced most of the European Economic Committee and Japan to support the Arab position.<sup>24</sup> Considering U.S. consumption demands for Middle East petroleum, Sadat realized oil would be a major economic tool that would fuel U.S. interests in the outcome of the conflict.

Finally, the need to redeem honor was a psychological factor underlying the resort to violence, with the long-term goal of regaining the land as a key motivation.<sup>25</sup> Although Sadat's threats during the last year would go unheeded from having cried 'wolf' before, in April 1973 he again made a public threat and announced upcoming radical changes for the Middle East. In light of his recent aborted military action the previous month, his threats fell on death ears; a plan that Sadat claims to have calculated.

## **Plans and priorities**

### **Politics and military synergy at work**

The strength of Sadat's planning rested in his ability to synergize his political and military objectives. His plans were both sequential and cumulative. He reorganized his military forces, restructured the general staff, enhanced individual/unit training, modernized equipment, and developed detailed defensive and offensive military plans in order to force a diplomatic solution. At the same time he was rebuilding the military, Sadat continued to seek peace with Israel through

all means available. To that end, he developed alliances, opened the domestic economy to national and international investments, and restructured the domestic national government with himself firmly in charge. All measures were collectively taken to reach his ultimate goal. Although he relied on his military leaders to do their job, he continually engaged them to ensure military plans complemented his vision.

While actively pursuing diplomatic efforts to resolve the standoff, Sadat continued to move forward, garnering all available resources to support his concurrent plans for war. Since the U.S. was not backing away from either Israel or support for status quo in the Middle East, Sadat had little option but to postpone his efforts to persuade them diplomatically. He would have to pressure them into making concessions from a position of strength.

## **Means to ends**

### **Resource and cost applications**

Waging war against Israel carried a heavy price for Egypt. Already spread thin with support to Palestinian resistance movements on the borders of the occupied territories, Sadat had also invested heavily in military arms and equipment to replace much of what had been lost in 1967. Although these costs were justified to provide Egypt a sufficient defense against further encroachment, they had heavily burdened Egypt economically.<sup>26</sup> Costs and risks are associated with any war -- the extent to which Egypt was willing to absorb them, however, did not outweigh what they had to gain. LE127 million Egyptian pounds were spent on war preparations, and resources from Alexandria to Aswan were committed territorially.<sup>27</sup> Egyptian infrastructure had back up plans for continued operations built in to the war plans. With insufficient food supplies for a lengthy battle, and the inability to make financial commitments, the war would have to be short; otherwise Egypt could not survive.

Sadat also recognized the weaknesses of his power and wisely used Egypt's few natural and social determinants in his planning. Economically, preparing for a war with such high risks should have put the idea of another war out of his reach. Sadat, however, would use this dire position to his advantage – oil was a valued commodity in the West, and he would play this trump card wisely.

The most important step of Sadat's strategy was the relationship between means to ends. He set his priorities and evaluated tradeoffs between risks and costs. Extremely calculated, Sadat's ability to leverage his power in support of his objectives was an underlying reason for the successes achieved as a result of the Yom Kippur War. Sadat had to fulfill his promise to wage the battle of destiny or his credibility would be seriously eroded.<sup>28</sup> His military was trained, hyped, and had the will to fight. The cause had rallied his Arab neighbors, and Soviet offensive equipment was almost in place.

### **Israeli capabilities**

After Sadat made the political decision to use the military instrument of power, he went to great lengths to explain to his armed forces that their participation was not in support of an all out war, but rather, a limited violent action that would parallel other diplomatic efforts. Ahmad Isma'il's, the General Commander of the Egyptian armed forces, first act was to turn Sadat's bold political decision into a military plan of attack. His staff was aware that their president's grand strategy required the armed forces to play a critical role, and although not stated, it was a role they could not lose. General Isma'il assigned Major General Bahey el Din Mohamed Nofal to evaluate Israeli capabilities, to assess countermeasures, and to develop an operational concept that would provide the best opportunity for military success. Israel had several major advantages: (1) air superiority, (2) a small but well trained, battle-tested standing force with a strong reserve component, (3) guaranteed U.S. military assistance, and (4) a well defended occupied territorial border along the

Bar-Levi line at the Suez Canal, and on the Golan Heights.<sup>29</sup> Israel's disadvantages were (1) an extended line of communication, (2) economic limitations for a prolonged conflict, (3) inability to withstand great manpower losses and the requirement for a large reserve force, and (4) an arrogant belief in their own invincibility. General Isma'il focused on these disadvantages as centers of gravity throughout his military planning. He would also give considerable focus to Israel's conceit as the key to their success in the upcoming military operation. Indeed, both the Israeli political and security establishments were convinced that the Arab powers were incapable of launching a military offensive.<sup>30</sup> The ease of Israeli success against three of their Arab neighbors in the 1967 war, combined with the constructed hardened defensive positions in the Golan Heights to the North and the Bar Lev Line in the South, lulled the Israel into a false sense of security. From these assumptions, the Egyptian commanders developed a plan for a limited war that would be strong enough to deliver a massive initial blow, throwing Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) off balance. At the same time, they could provide sufficient reserve forces to defend against an inevitable Israeli counterattack.

In forming their military plans, Sadat and his commanders objectively assessed their relative strengths – both manpower resources and their just cause for war, and their weaknesses -- defensive 'trench warfare' mentality and two years of 'status quo.' Sadat prepared to wage war alone, but realized Syria's direct support would greatly enhance their chance for success. He also courted other Arab states for support once the offensive was underway.<sup>31</sup> Sadat's belief that Soviet military support would continue, regardless of the lack of overt approval, was a central component of his use of a limited military option. Faced with seemingly difficult odds and severe economic constraints, Egypt's military options favored limited objectives in order to maximize their potential for success.

## **Military objectives**



Sadat's political objectives were clear. He would use a limited war to force a political solution to the stalemate, deter future aggression of potential adversaries, give credence to Egypt's regional role, and provide an engine for economic growth and development.<sup>32</sup> Any territory gain, no matter how small, would be a victory for the Arabs. To this end, General Isma'il developed his military strategy and assault plan (Codename Badr) based on the synergy among Sadat's political goals, adversarial capabilities, and the limitations of Arab resources. Military commanders considered a war of attrition as an option, but dismissed it based on Sadat's political goals and military preferences for a limited war. To meet Sadat's goals with the available Arab resources, the assault plan had to at least deliver a blow to Israel's main center of gravity, as well as crush the Israeli national belief in its military invincibility. Given the relative balance of power, Sadat's options were limited by the complex operation of crossing the Suez Canal, the hardened defensive positions on the Golan Heights, and Israel's perceived air and armor superiority. Sadat formed a centralized Arab military command to coordinate Egyptian and Syrian forces. This structure provided careful centralized planning and coordinated operational timetables. Israeli advantages could be countered by breaking their main center of gravity through a centrally coordinated Arab plan. This plan included: forging a deception plan to attain full strategic surprise in the early stage of the war, exploiting the span of time Israel needed to mobilize reserve forces, conducting a coordinated attack on two fronts, attacking along the entire 175km front, using massive anti-tank infantry teams, and integrating anti-air defense missiles and air defense artillery to defend air bases and bridgeheads.

The procedures produced specific combat missions that were assigned to the respective Arab armed forces: "Egypt would plan a breakthrough of the Suez Canal, destroy the Bar-Lev Line, and capture bridgeheads at the depth of 10-15 km on the East bank of the canal in order to inflict heavy casualties on the enemy. In addition, Egyptian forces would contain and destroy every

counterattack of the enemy by force of arms and execute further combat missions as assigned. Syria was assigned the mission 'to attack and break through the enemy's defense lines on the Golan, Divide its concentrations and destroy its forces and reach the river Jordan's line and the eastern shore of Lake Tiberius.'<sup>33</sup> The absolute need for secrecy was central to the Egyptian military plans and critical to offset Israeli strengths. The Arab attack plans would fail without the element of surprise, and the meticulous planning and implementation of new equipment would be for naught. Selection of a religious holiday for the Day of Atonement further supported the element of strategic surprise. With October 6<sup>th</sup> set as the attack date, General Isma'il, newly appointed as the Unified Arab Commander, finalized the attack orders while maintaining near continuous demonstrations of Arab military exercises that had been crafted to lull the Israelis into a false security posture. Staging a final military exercise as cover, Egyptian forces launched a successful attack across the Suez Canal while the Syrians executed an attack on Israel in the North. No small feat for a desert land army, crossing a heavily defended water hazard under fire was a successful display of new technology in a tactical maneuver: the use of water cannons to blow down sand walls, the construction of homemade pontoon bridges, and man portable anti-tank missiles interspersed with armor against Israeli armored formations were masterful demonstrations of Egyptian advances. The military continued to follow their objectives according to plan following the successful breakthrough across the canal and the establishment of the bridgehead. The Egyptian defense strategy took maximum advantage of the first generation Soviet anti-tank missile and anti-aircraft weapons systems that resulted in nearly a week of complete success against Israeli counterattacks. Egyptian integrated defensive positions around the bridgehead were only put at risk when they were compelled to respond to Syria's call for help. Although Syria had demonstrated early successes, Israel had almost pushed them back to Damascus and they were in desperate need of relief.

## **Centers of Gravity**

The primary center of gravity for the Egyptian military strategy included the psychological defeat of Israeli arrogance and destruction of the Israeli myth of ‘secure borders.’ The tenets of this myth were based on maintaining the initiative (first strike), military power of deterrence (superior air force and armored formations), and on the ability of fighting Arab states one at a time while garnering U.S. support. To attack these centers of gravity, Egypt’s successful military operation needed to surprise Israel and take away its initiative, deprive it of air supremacy through an integrated air defense system, and turn its psychological arrogance to the Arab advantage – fight Israel on Arab terms.

The Egyptian and Syrian political leaderships’ definition of the strategic war aim was to inflict a comprehensive defeat to the Israeli forces in the Sinai and the Golan Heights, to take over strategic important areas in order to prepare the appropriate conditions to complete the liberation of the occupied territories by the force of arms, and to enforce a just political solution to the problem.<sup>34</sup> While Israel lost half her armored force and nearly one-third her air force, Sadat suffered military losses as well. Both sides claimed a victory, with Egypt clearly declared the winner by the Arab community.

## **Conclusions: Sadat’s grand strategy success**

### **Managing uncertainty**

The outcome of a grand strategy depends on the quality of one’s thoughts, efficiency of one’s actions, circumstances, and the unforeseen.<sup>35</sup> Sadat’s ability to project Egyptian gains into the future was the key instrument to achieving his political objectives. He systematically evaluated his courses of action and adjusted his plans as the situation unfolded. The success of the military attack had ultimately hinged on the timing factor and the ability to achieve surprise. Without it, he

could have anticipated defeat. Sadat's true strength in his national security strategy was evident in his skill at constantly revisiting his statecraft tools, the assumptions, and the international and domestic situation. Uncertainty existed on all fronts, from the Soviet's commitment to provide military support to Western intervention, and Sadat's demonstrated flexibility and willingness to confront these challenges contributed to his success.

### **Merging military and national security strategies**

The famous Prussian military strategist, Clausewitz, once said 'All wars are about politics.' This war was no exception. Key to Sadat's success was the fact that he never lost sight of his end-state vision -- the preservation of Egypt's national interests, nor did he waiver in his efforts to ensure compatibility between political and military objectives. Sadat proved successful at converting challenges and threats into opportunities, and as a result, he was able to demonstrate his ability to impact issues in the global community, opening the door for Egypt to be taken seriously once again.

Critical to his success was the ability to accurately assess the pulse of the Arab people. He monitored public opinion and recognized the critical nature of this support. He also knew he needed it for the conversion of his latent power into actual power as the time for war drew near. Sadat's national interests did not change throughout the process, nor did his political objectives. One of his major strengths was his ability to capitalize on the strengths and weaknesses of the tools of statecraft in his strategy, while ultimately planning for the use of force to achieve his ends. Because the national interests that he sought to preserve were vital to Egypt's survival, Sadat saw no choice *but* to fight for them – for Egypt. Did Anwar Sadat run political and military risks? Perhaps. But these were calculated risks used to his advantage in the pursuit of renewed diplomacy in the Middle East. Samuel Huntington wrote 'protection of vital interests warrants bloodshed,' and for Egypt, this was never questioned. The Yom Kippur War was about dignity, a battle of

honor, it was not against Zionism.<sup>36</sup> Was the cost of the war worth it, is not a question warranting debate in Egypt. Even the military losses and casualties suffered in 1956 and 1967 were insufficient to preempt this conflict. Success of Sadat's strategy was validated by its relationship to his commitment to Egypt's national interests.

### **Short-term goals – a success story**

The Yom Kippur War preserved the dignity of the Arab people, regained their territory, and broke new ground that led to peace between Egypt and Israel. Egypt saw the return of the Red Sea and the Sinai oil fields, as well as the promise of aid packets that would strengthen its economy. Additionally, the peace that Sadat pursued would change the regional environment. The implementation of 'infitah' (opening) of the Egyptian economy to market forces is a progress that continues today.<sup>37</sup> Egypt's willingness to be a pacesetter for the region in both domestic and foreign policies is one of the key reasons that Egypt became of prime importance to the United States and contributed to the development of the mutually benefiting relationship between them.<sup>38</sup> Sadat proved to be a master at using his actual power in a demonstration of force as a means to further his national strategy and achieve his political and military objectives. All efforts were dedicated to this battle and all was at stake.<sup>39</sup> The costs of the war were insufficient to overcome the pressure within the Arab camp and ultimately forced Sadat to take drastic action to change the status quo.<sup>40</sup>

### **The next step**

Peace with Israel must mean more than the absence of war; it must be built on a gradual reduction and elimination of the causes of conflict, on gradually establishing trust and confidence, and on habits of constructive discourse and personal interaction in order to succeed.<sup>41</sup> Given that the Middle East region is not without frailty, the important question for strategists is whether or not

the successful use of force in the Yom Kippur War will influence future decisions to use force as a statecraft tools options to achieve political ends.

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Phebe Marr, Egypt at the Crossroads, pp. xiii.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp. 157.
- <sup>3</sup> Craig Gordon, Force and Statecraft, pp. 187.
- <sup>4</sup> Major General A.H. Farrar—Hockley, “The October War”, pp. 14.
- <sup>5</sup> The Yom Kippur War, reading 2, pp. 47.
- <sup>6</sup> Bard O’Neil, “The October War,” pp. 28.
- <sup>7</sup> Phebe Marr, Egypt at the Crossroads, pp. 157.
- <sup>8</sup> Major General A.H. Farrar-Hockley, “The October War,” pp. 14.
- <sup>9</sup> The Yom Kippur War, reading 2, pp. 55.
- <sup>10</sup> Phebe Marr, Egypt at the Crossroads, pp. 32.
- <sup>11</sup> The year of decision was referred to as 1971
- <sup>12</sup> Craig Gordon, Force and Statecraft, pp. 192.
- <sup>13</sup> Anwar Sadat Biography, <http://www.ibiblio.org/sullivan/bios>
- <sup>14</sup> Anwar Sadat, In Search of Identity, reading 3, pp. 239.
- <sup>15</sup> Craig Gordon, Force and Statecraft, pp. 187.
- <sup>16</sup> El Hassan Badri, The Ramadan War, reading 4, pp. 18.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid. pp. 19.
- <sup>18</sup> Craig Gordon, Force and Statecraft, pp. 188.
- <sup>19</sup> El Hassan Badr, The Ramadan War, reading 4, pp. 16.
- <sup>20</sup> Craig Gordon, Force and statecraft, pp. 221.
- <sup>21</sup> “The Yom Kippur War,” reading 2, pp. 47.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid. pp. 56.
- <sup>23</sup> El Hassan Badri, The Ramadan War, reading 4, pp. 17.
- <sup>24</sup> Bard O’Neil, “The October War: A Political-Military Assessment” reading 1, pp. 31.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid. pp. 32.
- <sup>26</sup> Major General A.H. Farrar—Hockley, “The October War,” reading 6, pp. 14.
- <sup>27</sup> LE127 Egyptian pounds is roughly equivalent to 200 million U.S. dollars
- <sup>28</sup> Bard E. O’Neil, “The October War: A Political-Military Assessment,” reading 1, pp. 32.
- <sup>29</sup> El Badri, Hassan, The Ramadan War, 1973, pp. 19.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 57.
- <sup>31</sup> Kumaraswamy, P.R. Revisiting the Yom Kippur War, pp. 49.
- <sup>32</sup> Phebe Marr, Egypt at the Crossroads, pp. 107.
- <sup>33</sup> Kumaraswamy, P.R. Revisiting the Yom Kippur War, pp. 56.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 56.
- <sup>35</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, “Containment and the Logic of Strategy,” pp. 38.
- <sup>36</sup> Bard E. O’Neil, “The October War: A Political-Military Assessment,” pp. 32.
- <sup>37</sup> Phebe Marr, pp. xviii.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. xv.



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<sup>39</sup> Anwar Sadat, In Search of Identity, reading 3, pp. 241.

<sup>40</sup> Craig Gordon, *Force and Statecraft*, pp. 192.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 247.